The Reverend Meg Barnhouse

BRYAN, TX - The Reverend Meg Barnhouse died on January 13, 2026, at her home in Bryan, Texas, after a long and courageous journey with cancer. A beloved Unitarian Universalist minister, author, songwriter, and truth-teller, Meg lived her life out loud—marked by humor, tenderness, and an unflinching eye for humanity in all its mess and glory.

Born Margaret Ann Barnhouse in Philadelphia on August 30, 1955, she was the daughter of Katherine Hamilton and Donald Grey Barnhouse, and the older sister of Ruth. Her early life included years at the Baldwin School in Philadelphia and time spent in Statesville, North Carolina, with her mother's family. She earned her B.A. from Duke University and her M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary, where she won the coveted preaching prize.

Meg began her ministry in the Presbyterian tradition and was ordained on Pentecost in 1981. Her life unfolded with remarkable honesty and courage: her marriage to the Reverend Mark Durrett; the births of her sons, Sam and Ned; her work in pastoral counseling; her divorce; and her coming out as a lesbian in 1995. Her professional writing career began with Hub City and Skinner House presses, alongside chaplaincy and teaching at Converse College. In the late 1990s, she transitioned into Unitarian Universalism, and met her future wife, Reverend Kiya Heartwood, a move that reflected her lifelong commitment to living authentically.

For decades, Rev. Barnhouse served the Unitarian Universalist movement with brilliance and heart. She spent eleven years as Senior Minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin and also served congregations in Princeton, New Jersey; Greenville, South Carolina; and Spartanburg, South Carolina. In Spartanburg, she founded SAFE HOMES for victims of domestic violence and was a fierce advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights throughout the 1990s. Meg was a preacher who could make you laugh mid-sermon and leave you in tears by the benediction—a leader who trusted love more than fear. Her influence extended into social justice, counseling, and teaching, and her popular NPR segments, including Radio Free Bubba, brought her wit and wisdom to a national audience.

Meg's words traveled far beyond the pulpit. As an author and songwriter, she crafted essays, books, and music for UU World, NPR, and other publications—work that was by turns irreverent, piercing, and deeply kind. She had a rare gift for naming what others circled around: desire, grief, doubt, joy, failure, and hope. She believed faith should be lived in real bodies and real relationships, often delivering this truth with a grin—and backed by a second-degree black belt in karate.

She was known for her fierce compassion, her wicked sense of humor, and her refusal to pretend that love is tidy or faith is easy. She welcomed seekers and skeptics alike, never confusing holiness with politeness. To know Meg was to be invited into deeper honesty, braver love, and better questions.

She is survived by her wife, Reverend Kiya Heartwood; her sons, Sam and Ned Durrett; their wives, Emily and Emilee Durrett; and her five grandchildren, Piper Leigh, Hollis, Willow, Vance, and Early. She also leaves behind her sister, Ruth Story; her stepmother, Lisbeth Barnhouse; her half-sisters, Lucy and Joanna; and an extended, unruly, and devoted community of family, friends, and congregants.

Two services will be held to celebrate her life and ministry. The first will take place on February 27 at the UU Church of the Brazos Valley in Bryan, Texas, at 6:00 p.m. The second service will be held at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin on February 28 at 11:00 a.m. Both services will be livestreamed.

"We have not come here to take prisoners,
But to surrender ever more deeply to freedom and joy. We have not come into this exquisite world to hold ourselves hostage from love...". Hafiz

THE J.M.
DUNBAR
Funeral Home & Crematory

Copyright © 2026 Herald-Journal 2/26/2026
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service and Privacy Polic